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Gentrification 2.0

Von Gentrification träumen

Es ist jetzt fünfzig Jahre her, dass Dr. Martin Luther King sagte: »I have a dream« (1963). In dieser berühmten Ansprache schaut er zurück auf viele Jahre der Unterdrückung der schwarzen Bevölkerung und stellt sich im Traum eine bessere Zukunft vor. Obwohl es sich bei Gentrification um ein weit weniger pathetisches Thema handelt, wollen auch wir auf viele Jahre unterschiedlicher Debatten um Gentrification zurückblicken und fragen, wie es weiter gehen soll. Wie kann man sich die Zukunft von Gentrification vorstellen und träumen? Wir haben den Eindruck, dass das Thema mittlerweile »ausgeforscht« ist, keine wesentlich neuen Erkenntnisse mehr zu Tage gefördert werden und zu keinen neuen Inspirationen anregt. Wir glauben auch, dass wir in dieser Einschätzung nicht alleine sind. Ohne neuesten, unbestritten wichtigen Erkenntnissen auf diesem Gebiet zu nahe treten zu wollen, stellen wir vielmehr eine stetige Wiederholung gleicher Fragestellungen, Methoden und Befunde fest. Nach unzähligen Forschungsprojekten, Büchern und Debatten kennt man nun alle Positionen, aber kommt dennoch nicht weiter. Gleichzeitig fragen wir uns, was ein alternativer Zugang sein könnte: Könnte Gentrification sogar neu gedacht (analytisch, in der Praxis und Politik) und so aus der Sackgasse geholt werden? In diesem Beitrag wollen wir das mögliche konzeptuelle Werkzeug dazu erörtern, in der Hoffnung, dass es neue Diskussionen und zum Neu-Träumen über Gentrification anregt. Unsere Gedanken basieren dabei auf einem konkreten international vergleichenden Forschungsprojektes, das im Rahmen des Europäischen Programms »Urban Europe« mit Partnern in Österreich, der Schweiz, der Türkei und in den Niederlanden durchgeführt wird. Aus diesem Grund führen wir diesen Beitrag auf Englisch weiter.

Gentrification 1.0

Within the somewhat saturated discourse on gentrification, debates have displayed a tendency to polarise along theoretical cleavages

very much familiar to the social sciences in general. The process of gentrification – here broadly understood as the inflow of middle class households into old working class neighbourhoods – commonly focuses on either eco-



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nomic (sometimes equated with ›productive‹) or cultural (denoted as ›consumptive‹) factors, or some dialectical relation between those general domains (for an overview, see Lees et al., 2008; 2010). On the one hand, economic, supply, or production theories (e.g. Smith, 1979; 1996) attribute gentrification to capital flowing into structural rent or value gaps. In opposition, liberal, cultural, demand, or consumption theories (e.g. Ley, 1994; 2003) attribute gentrification to changing aesthetic preferences of the new, ›creative‹, post-industrial middle class. Supplementarily, institutional theories, arguably of more importance in the European and especially also Dutch context, emphasise the role of the state in leading gentrification. Uitermark's and Duyvendak's contribution (2007) has been seminal in this regard, showing how, despite an initial lack of productive and consumptive interest in it, Dutch disadvantaged neighbourhoods are gentrified by governmental initiatives, aiming not so much for a strengthening of local tax bases or a catering to housing demands of a new middle class, but of politically alleviating ›revanchist‹ liveability concerns within the neighbourhood. In this latter respect the term ›gentrification‹ may gain another, somewhat more constructive meaning than is usual in especially the critical Marxist and governmentality literature, where it seems to stand only for displacement and oppression of original inhabitants, and thus for a ›nightmare‹, while the more positive connotation may also grant to ›dream‹ gentrification.

Still other explanations opt for an uneasy, dialectical juggle of these general, incommensurable paradigms in terms of ›complementarity‹ (e.g. Clark, 1992). And while this is a great step forward toward a more comprehensive approach, what this fragile solution still shares with its more confidently one-sided counterparts is that it is still too reductionist, and does not sufficiently take the contingent,

multi-layered and dynamic complexity of the phenomenon of gentrification into account. In stead of continuing in this pace, maybe we should try to develop a radically different take on gentrification, and start from the beginning with a totally different set of assumptions, which do not presume the classical positions and categorisations we already know and even in combination do not really bring us much further.

In the gentrification literature a number of potential conceptual starting points are discussed in different contexts. On the one hand, we have the concept of ›practice‹, which tries to overcome the one-sidedness of thinking of gentrification as a phenomenon which can easily and deliberately be ›made‹ by a single (dominant) actor, irrespective if this is the project developer, the municipal authorities, or the single creative newcomer in the neighbourhood. Going back to the work of e.g. Anthony Giddens (1986) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990), some see it as an interplay between both structure and agency, between habitus and field, which come together in a specific place and time. Combined with the strong focus of post-structuralist thinkers of the urban on dynamic and contingent discursive structures in this respect, this exemplifies a shift away from the still too one-sided ›action‹-theoretical approach, well known in German urban geography through the work of Benno Werlen (1993) towards a ›practice‹-theoretical approach as we know it from the work of Ted Schatzki (2010) and others (Reckwitz, 2002; Simonson, 2007; Stern, 2003). This implies that we need to ask what the ›practice‹ of gentrification is on the ground of the neighbourhood in question. In short-hand one thus could describe a ›practice‹ as the coinciding of different necessary and sufficient conditions, in stead of a deliberate creation. Gentrification is not just the implementation of a governmental policy for revival of a neighbourhood, and also not just the creation of a new image and atmosphere by some newcomers in that part of the city, nor the product of some real-estate investors. It is rather a coming together of a multiplicity of different practices out of which, what we post-hoc tend to represent as gentrification, emerges.

This is just one version of what is sometimes called a ›relational approach‹ in urban studies, linking together in a non-hierarchical way the many different place specific materialities, practices, actions, events and knowledges as

Figure 1: Facing complexity



well as other places, which are relevant for what ›takes place‹ in that specific part of the city. Actor network theory has grown prominent in that respect (see e.g. Farias & Bender, 2010; Boelens, 2010), asking what chains of practices actually make a city and gentrification happen (cf. Latour & Hermant, 1998¹).

In another, similar vein urban planners in their search for more comprehensive and relational approaches have been inspired by what is denoted as the complexity approach (Batty, 2005; Portugali, 2011; Portugali, Meyer & Stolk, 2012). This approach was developed from traditional quantitative urban modelling and was influenced by thermodynamics and chaos theory in the natural sciences (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) and focussed on cities as complex self-organising systems. Essential to this approach is the modelling of the spontaneous emergence of urban developments based on the linking together many elements or subsystems within the urban system. Overcoming the limits of this sheer quantitative modelling approach and extending it to also more qualitative approaches inspired by the work of the Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the idea of emergence of urban phenomena alike gentrification was developed further by a number of urban planners like Gert de Roo, Jean Hillier and Joris van Wezemael (2012)².

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also coined the term ›assemblage‹ (agencement), which may serve to express how urban phenomena are put together and assembled from a multitude of different parts, which all somehow work together to produce a functioning city (DeLanda 1997, 2006). And so in recent years ›assemblage‹ has successfully introduced itself to (urban) geography as a term for describing the contingent formation of the (place) specificity of an urban phenomenon or urban subsystem, in a broad field of urban difference, implying that e.g. the assemblage of gentrification (as in our case) in Arnhem (NL), Istanbul (TR), Vienna (A) or Zurich (CH) is not the same (cf. Lees, 2012). At the same time, it describes the dynamics of the rather indeterminate and unpredictable process as a continuous ›becoming‹ and ›renewing‹ (Anderson et al., 2012). Gentrification is thus not a situation but a pro-

cess. Describing the gentrification process as a preset number of stages (Lees, 2003; Pattison, 1977; 1983, Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Kerstein, 1990) certainly underscores this dynamics, but does not take the contingency and indeterminacy of the process sufficiently into account.

The concept of assemblage has been taken up in multiple ways. One prominent endeavour, mainly following Bruno Latour's (2005) appropriation of the term, interprets it through the lens of the actor network theory mentioned above (Farias & Bender, 2010; Farias, 2011). Another prominent line of assemblage theory follows Manuel DeLanda's ›new philosophy of society‹ (2006). McFarlane and others (McFarlane, 2011, Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, Anderson et al., 2012), in contradistinction to actor-network-theory, put less emphasis on rigidity and stability and bring attention to the fragile, contingent, yet creatively potent nature of assemblage relations.

Sympathetic to these developments, we want to elaborate on them here, but also extend them in a direction of more conceptual rigor. Therefore, we want to complement the existing geographical assemblage approaches with some ideas that were still very much prevalent in Deleuze and Guattari and in some of DeLanda's earlier works (e.g. 1991, 1997), ideas coming from general, dynamic and complex systems theories on more universal dynamics, like stable states or critical transitions (cf. Scheffer, 2009). As we will try and show, this undertaking allows a well defined research strategy and package of methods for investigating gentrification in a new way.

Assumptions about reality in assemblage theory

As Farias (2011, p. 369) notes, assemblages ›are self-contained processes of heterogeneous associations calling for a positive description of their becoming, not external explanations‹. Now we have asked ourselves, would the gentrification of this or that particular place be susceptible to such a description, moving beyond ›external explanations‹ in terms of general factors like economic structures or cultural motivations of in-moving middle class people? To arrive at what an assemblage approach has to offer to the debates surrounding the issue of gentrification, that is, to see how it may shed a very different light

¹ <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/EN/index.html> (accessed 14.09.2013)

² See also Alexander von Humboldt Lecture by Jean Hillier (2011) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrjrWeoXAI> (accessed, 14.09.2013)

onto the old matter, and answer this question positively, a detour through some ontological assumptions of assemblage theory is indispensable.

At the core of assemblage theory, as put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and DeLanda (2006, 2009), lies a critique of Aristotelian logic and its inherent essentialism. This is a classificatory logic of generalities and particulars that is pretty much basic to all western philosophical and scientific thinking. Within it, all individual planetary systems, animals, humans or geographical configurations are particular instances, that is, more or less true representations, of general laws, species or cultures. A science entertaining this type of logic is out to find these most general properties that make up the essential natures of every individual being. Thus, for example, the particular gentrification of this or that neighbourhood is to be studied as an instance of the laws of global urban capitalism. As a consequence, anomalies, aberrations from essence, when impossible to ignore, are explained away or pathologised. In geographical terms this translates into a law abiding sedentary space, as always already occupied by places from which flows depart, rather than the places emerging from those flows. These may be compared to reified container spaces also criticised by Benno Werlen (1993) in his pledge for focussing more on the processes of everyday place making and regionalisation.

There are two important problems with this traditional way of (scientific) reasoning that we want to touch upon here. First, an ontological hierarchy is introduced. Instead of individual, singular things having a right to exist in them selves, they owe their own essence, their existence, to some transcendental being, be it a creative God, nature and its laws, the mind's categories or society's structures. Second, with the introduction of this hierarchy, the world appears as essentially static, devoid of any true inner change and evolution. This is because general essences determine the form and fate of other beings and never the other way around; that would have to introduce a new interaction which, within this scheme of thought, would have to be determined by another, yet superior essence (e.g. if God the first mover created the world, who created God then? *Ad infinitum*). Thus, with eternal essences established, true change, other than mere aberration, becomes an utterly unintelligible matter. So, according to the traditional view,

we conceive each concrete process of gentrification as following a general law-like structure, and each individual actor in gentrifying areas as determined by such a gentrification process. From this point of view the emergence of gentrification is enacted by the coincidental coming together of certain circumstances and powers, in each case resulting in other (new) forms of urban development. It is exactly this ›emergence‹ complexity theory is focussing on.

These two problems are handled better within the assemblage approach. That is because, first off, an assemblage of singular individuals, events and circumstances is not conceived as having an ontological hierarchy; it is ontologically ›flat‹ (DeLanda, 2002). No single entity is capable of completely determining the behaviour of other entities. In this regard, assemblage theory indeed shows quite a bit of affinity with actor network theory (e.g. Latour, 2005). For the latter, building on science and technology studies (STS) and their symmetry of scientific and non-scientific knowledge, the world appears ›super-symmetric‹, that is, there is no fundamental ontological divide between the human and the non-human. They do not determine each other, but rather they jointly contribute to the emerging forms and results. For example, the social processes taking place in gentrifying areas are closely related to the material conditions and utter forms of the built structures, spaces, but also to its physical location and associated flows, within the city or within the broader urban system. Each linkage appears on the same level allowing endless combinations and linkages including novel, creative and unexpected tendencies and capacities to arise.

Thus one ends up with a kind of nonsensically flat reality, a chaotic, scale-free assemblage consisting solely of singular entities, events and conditions (cf. Marston, Jones III & Woodward, 2005). Second, therefore, the assemblage approach allows for true evolution and creativity, albeit not emanating from one transcendent source of agency, but as immanently distributed over and distributive of this assemblage with as yet no transcendently pre-ordained sense or direction.

One can, as one way of conceptualising this immanent dynamic creativity imagine the initial ›super-symmetry‹ of an utterly chaotic assemblage being broken through successive transformations or, as the physicists say,

›symmetry-breaking events‹ creating order out of chaos (cf. Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). A particular geography of gentrification may thus be conceived as taking form through the coagulation of flows of different materials, people and symbols resulting in an urban space thoroughly formed, filled, used and owned. This process does not emanate from one source, cause or agency, but results from an immanently distributed multiplicity of tendencies and capacities (DeLanda 2002). This way then, connecting assemblage theory with the discourse on place and space, so central to human geography (e.g. Harvey, 1996, Portugali, 2006), we propose to view gentrification as the product of a sequence of events, or ›trajectory‹ (Massey, 2005), moving from the vaguely defined taking place of a city or district, to its concretisations in meticulously measured space. Geographical assemblages, woven as they are from these trajectories of spatial emergence, may then be viewed as bundles or ›simultaneities‹ of what Massey terms ›stories-so-far‹ (2005, p. 12). Whereby these ›trajectories‹ or ›stories‹ emphasise the process of change in a phenomenon, be it ›a living thing, a scientific attitude, a collectivity, a social convention, a geological formation‹ (Massey, 2005, p. 12). This processual concept of geographical assemblages will keep reminding us of their sometimes neglected dynamic yet structured and always ›under construction‹ character.

From this assemblage perspective the ›geographical becoming‹ of a gentrified neighbourhood boils down to four basic dynamics that may serve as a research framework for assembling empirical trajectories of all kinds. Here we can only sum them up briefly:

First, there is the basic dynamic responsible for the development of a specific (topological) structure in the network of relations resulting in stratification, establishing simple *tendencies*. In system dynamic terms, we are talking of ›stable states‹ (maxima and minima) and ›points of critical transition‹ to alternative states (Scheffer 2009). For example think of how for Bourdieu the ›hysteresis effect‹ produces a change of habitus by means of an earlier change in the field of (topological) relations (Hardy, 2008; Jeffery, 2012), or with respect to the gentrification process in one of our own neighbourhoods of study, Klarendal (Arnhem, NL), one of the popular upheavals against the extending drug scene in the neighbourhood could very well represent such a point of cri-

tical transition. Another, very interesting one could be the potential overall transition to a stable, gentrified state.

Second, with a topological state space established, a sufficiently consistent assemblage may capitalise on its interstices and traverse it through evolution: ›blind‹ differentiation and integration, trial and error. Thus, on the blind quest for sustenance within a wider ecology, stable states and critical transitions interlock on multiple scales to incrementally probe and gather more and more complex *capacities*. In the human realm, this is the domain of skilled, bodily practices of craftsmanship and dialogic rhetorics (cf. Sennett, 2009, 2013). Methodologically speaking, this is where ethnography is at its best, attentive as it is to bodily environments and everyday creativity. So here, we are talking about daily practices, which constantly are trying to cope with the changing circumstances, i.e. tendencies within the neighbourhood, building a certain know-how represented in new ›life-styles‹, ›means of interaction‹, ›rules of the game‹ and ›tactics‹ (cf. de Certeau, 1984).

Figure 2: Representation of Klarendal as Fashion Quarter



Third, within this ecology of skills and practices a centre may appear with the capacity of commanding and representing the assemblage. You may again think of the example of Klarendal (Arnhem, NL), where the gentrification process was at a certain moment put under the banner of ›Fashion Quarter‹ (*Modekwartier*) and represented as such, while a cluster of small fashion boutiques and workshops, emerged and contributed to the power of success in this part of town. In terms of the theory of social systems, one could speak of

loose couplings of a mediamatic and technical kind, which are placed under the command of more tightly individuated forms of observation and communication (cf. Luhmann, 2012). Thus initially rather fluid couplings are stabilised by the feedbacks issuing from their representation as more distinct possibilities. Such observational forms attribute and decide on, however rudimentary or non-linguistic, causality, action and observation itself. Organisations, like municipalities, consisting of recursive networks of decisions (Luhmann, 2005), attribute responsibility to persons or institutions and develop a diversity of scenarios for possible action. Methods most apt for interpreting these dynamics in human assemblages are all kinds of discursive analytical strategies (see Andersen, 2003).

Fourth, while in this way a specific identity is established, and related to that identity also specific properties are singled out, the phenomenon of gentrification becomes measurable and can be positioned in an ›objective‹ metric space, in which an equivalence between ›objects‹ or ›signs‹, between properties and numbers is assumed. Money being the most prominent of those symbolic media or ›metrics‹ (Simmel, 2011, Graeber, 2011), but also truth, power, health, etc. are examples of such media (Luhmann, 1997). Each symbolic medium (potentially) represents the whole world (everything has its price, beauty, truth etc.), in order to establish a quantified order between a great mass of observers through convention and exchange rather than unilateral physical or symbolic violence. In the case of gentrification one could think institutions producing measures of ›hipster-friendliness‹, qualifying how the influx of yuppies is welcomed, or of the share of ›creative class‹ in the population, or of the ›increase in real-estate value‹ as such. These kind of modern (folk) sociologies and economics are exemplary attempts of coming to grips with the above mentioned generalised symbolic spheres we usually consider domains of ›knowledge‹ (cf. Leydesdorff, 2006). However, like abstract spaces, these measured properties and their modelling should not be reified. What is typically disregarded here, is how these ›markets‹ and ›fields‹ (cf. Bourdieu, 1984, 2005), assigning all things and people their quantified properties, are produced and materially bootstrapped within regional ecologies of objectifying and individualising institutions (Foucault, 1977, DeLanda, 1997, 2006, Latour, 1988, 2005). Therefore, assemblage theory with its bottom-up approach,

goes to great pains to account for the emergence of always local, practical and interpretative production of knowledge with global truth claims. Research strategies provided by science and technology studies are very helpful in this regard.

In sum, we have virtual *tendencies* combining into more concrete *capacities*, which are then, through categorical means represented as individuated *possibilities*. Further, when these possibilities are calculated on (cf. Callon, 1998), they may acquire measured *properties*. This way we move from a truly infinite range of potential tendencies to a very restricted world of clearly delineated, actual properties – a world that is much too often held to be the one and only possible world. Sadly, this also holds true for too many studies of gentrification.

Gentrification 2.0

How would this rather philosophical excursion work for the geographical engagement with processes of gentrification? Taking our cue from Phillips (2002, 2004), we ascertain that gentrification issues, whether approached as primarily economically, culturally or institutionally determined (or all three), have been dominated by a particular kind of quantitative, ›first-space‹ epistemology (e.g. Ley 1986). Inspired by Lefebvre, Phillips distinguishes between first-space (›open to accurate measurement‹), second-space (›imaginary, projective‹) and third-space (›directly lived‹) geographies of gentrification. Now if we allow ourselves to shake down Phillips' phenomenological focus on epistemic matters, more or less inherited from Lefebvre, following not a ›cultural‹ (Lees, 2002), but a ›speculative turn‹ (Bryant et al., 2011), and relate these first-, second- and third-spaces of gentrification in morphogenetic terms rather than ›trialectically‹ (Phillips, 2002, 2004), we might arrive at a geography of gentrification that moves beyond the dialectical versions of the ›I.O.‹ debates, still thoroughly rooted in nineteenth century political oppositions.

Crucial in this regard, is taking ›the economy‹, ›culture‹ and ›state‹ for the discursive ›second-space‹ and calculated ›first-space‹ constructions they are. That is, they should be regarded as the concrete product of a trajectory of symmetry-breaking events in which stratified networks practically generate

meaningful perspectives to be scientifically measured. From such a meta-scientific/STS perspective then, first-space constructions of gentrification, rooted in long popularised (second-space) political views, may become implicated in the empirical assemblage. Thus, in an assemblage approach, tying ›the economy‹, ›culture‹ and ›state‹ back to Earth as representations of and as such implicated parts of empirical assemblages, these domains of social life all share the same ontological structure. That is, apart from a ›first-space‹ economy of exchange values and prices there is a ›second-space‹ qualitative discourse on use values, which is only a rough representation of a ›third-space‹ affective practice of working with and handling of (human and non-human) materials. Similarly, apart from a more or less monetarily specified ›field‹ of cultural capital, emerging from ›distinctions‹ like authentic/fabricated (Bourdieu, 1984), there is an always evolving and innovative aesthetic practice of skilled sensing, desiring and crafting. And even the state institutions, with their heavy focus on statistical ›governmentality‹, are built on several ›panoptic‹ arrangements generating ›facts and figures‹ through indexical administration practices and discursive norms (Foucault, 1977, 1991).

What stands out then, as the central omission of the usual 1.0 approaches to gentrification, is the lack of a distinct practical dimension, of third-space (as we conceive it here). While economic, quantitative explanations may even leave out, in their explanation, discursive elements (as merely epiphenomenal ideologies), let alone bring in a practical dimension, cultural explanations equally lack a grip on dynamics of praxis by too easily equating (affective landscapes of) desire, despair, solidarity and everyday mannerisms with their utopian or dystopian discursive representations. There may be great discrepancies between what people do how and what they say. Think of, for instance, the much encountered ›social tectonics‹ in daily neighbourhood inter-passivity between ethnic groups despite fancy stories in praise of diversity (Butler & Robson, 2001). To continue on this example, gentrification 2.0, fully taking on board the socio-material dimension of practice, should look for places of ›intercultural‹ difference, that is, places where people in a symbiotic vein develop new doings together, beyond sayings of ›multicultural‹ diversity.

To conclude then, an assemblage theory of gentrification takes in, not only topological flows (of still to be shaped people, goods, communications), but especially the level of interpersonal practices acting on those flows. This, of course, apart from organisational decisions, utopian/dystopian stories and governmental calculations and valuations. Moreover, this fourfold of dynamics is not to be conceived as a dialectic of generalities, as in the 1.0 approaches, but as a multiplicity of nested events (cf. DeLanda, 2002, p. 30). As such, we expect this ontological innovation to be much more potent than traditional approaches in enlightening the local singularities of a process of gentrification that is today considered by some a ›global urban strategy‹ (Smith, 2002). Correspondingly, also, a new gentrification policy and planning practice (2.0), would probably display a lot more attention to the interpersonally evolving skills and work it takes to make the gentrified environment more than merely ›safe‹ and ›livable‹. That is, make it economically and ecologically sustainable and nurturing for all involved.

Planning gentrification 2.0?

How do we get from the theory to the concrete research and planning practice? And what could be the implications of this new approach to gentrification for planners, policy and community? Contrary to the politically charged 1.0 approaches to the subject, the 2.0 assemblage approach sets out to re-appropriate the issue of gentrification in a more nuanced and constructive way. Thus, assemblage theory is not ›critical‹ in a Marxist or Frankfurter sense (e.g. Brenner, 2009), or ›deconstructionist‹ in a poststructuralist way (e.g. Lees, 1996; 2000). While an initial deconstruction of reified generalities like ›the market‹ or ›culture‹ can be very useful to arrive at a flat ontology, it is also only an initial step to developing an immanent constructivism of abstract dynamics of gentrification. Such a constructive take could potentially facilitate a new practice of gentrification (2.0).

For this purpose a mixed toolbox of methods is essential, including different methods mapping different phases of geographical morphogenesis. The assemblage approach, with its reflexive and ›meta-scientific‹ perspective, allows for the integration of different data and methods usually considered incommensurable. That is, an integration allowing for a

urban geography is constructed as gentrified – a construction not determined by one party or factor, but always the product of distributed labour within a metaphysically flat, or ›democratic‹ world (cf. Bryant, 2011). As such, cartography could function as a veritable ›intuition synthesizer‹ (cf. DeLanda 1992) inciting ever new dreams of gentrifications to come.

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